

# Richard Baker and the Myth of the Zen Roshi

by Stuart Lachs

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## Introduction

Most people think of Zen as being iconoclastic, anti-authoritarian, simple, direct, and unattached. Its *raison d'être* is to produce people who possess a fundamental insight into life, people who are not fooled by appearances or ideas. The fact is that almost everything about Zen's presentation, practice, and rituals is aimed at producing people who give up their good sense with the promise of a greater gain in the future. While this is obviously a general statement that demands further qualification, it serves to introduce some of the basic problems to be dealt with here. Please keep it in mind. This is not a new idea nor is it unique to Chan/Zen. David Hume said in his *Of the First principles of Government* (1758) that "Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few, and the implicit submission with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers." I believe that the reason for this surrender, in the case of Zen, is clear, structural, and self-perpetuating.

What I mean by the "Zen" institution, for the simple purpose of this conversation, is the organized set of structures that support the standard model of Zen. According to this model, mind-to-mind transmission began with an encounter between the historical Buddha Sakyamuni and Mahakasyapa, and continued, in an unbroken lineage, through twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs. The last of these was Bodhidharma, who began the patriarchal line in China that led to Hui-neng, traditionally considered to be the sixth and last Chan patriarch. This scheme was later institutionalized through the ritual of Dharma transmission. Mind-to-mind transmission implies that the student has attained an understanding equal to his Zen master/roshi and so on backwards, hence being equal to the original, unmediated wordless understanding that supposedly passed between Sakyamuni and Mahakasyapa. Supporting tools to make this narrative seem real and unconstructed include the particular methods of meditation and interactions between teacher and student as well as an abundance of validating mythologies most often presented as history in the form of biography, along with accommodating literary and ritual devices. It is this idealized version of Dharma transmission that claims the master is an enlightened being that is the source of the Zen master's extraordinary claim to authority.

This is not to imply that there is no value to be gained in the practice of Zen. It simply means that a power structure has evolved that will perpetuate itself even if it means imputing "attainment" to people who don't really have it. To legitimize the various family lines within Zen, Zen's self-definition necessitates establishing a continuing unbroken lineage of transmitted masters connected to the historical Buddha. The conception of an unbroken lineage based on the idea of mind-to-mind transmission going back to the Buddha superseded a previous idea of authority that was based on texts, i.e., the sutras, which were understood to embody the words of the historical Buddha. You can see how much more potent it is to have a teacher presented as a living Buddha or at least Buddha-like, who, instead of simply interpreting and explaining the words of the Buddha, actually speaks with the same voice as the Buddha. This new Buddha is also alive and homegrown and hence more immediate and real. All of this authority and potency is manifested in the rituals of the Zen master commenting on and judging the words and actions of not only

their disciples, but also of anyone in the lineage going all the way back to and including, the historical Buddha. It is a performance meant to confirm and display the current master's significance, authority and attainment.

Michael Downing's book, *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center* (2001) describes much of the sexual scandal surrounding Richard Baker, as well as financial problems and Baker's generally arrogant behavior. Not only is the book a compelling read; it also, more importantly perhaps, provides raw data for observing Zen mythmaking in action. It allows us a much closer look than we get through, say, looking at the many biographies of past masters from Chan in China during the Tang dynasty (CE 618-907).

Richard Baker is an extremely bright and talented person and a born salesman. Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, shortly before his death in December 1971, gave him Dharma transmission in the Soto sect of Zen, thereby making Baker, for his students and for all future people in his lineage, an authentic link to the Buddha. At that time, Baker also became the official leader of the San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC).

Baker is the sole western heir of Suzuki Roshi, a Japanese Zen teacher who founded the SFZC and its mountain training center, Tassajara established in 1967. Downing interviewed roughly eighty people, most of them Baker's students, approximately eighteen years after Baker was forced to resign. The San Francisco Zen Center "scandal" was not unique in American Zen history. In fact there are few major centers not touched by sexual or other scandals, but the SFZC case suffices for the discussion we will have here.

The idea of the enlightened Zen master authenticated through the ritual of dharma transmission and maintained by an unbroken lineage going back to the historical Buddha is at the heart of the Zen tradition. In this scheme, each teacher can trace his lineage and hence, authenticity, back to the historical Buddha. The implications of this authority in some ways far outstrip that bestowed upon the highest secular authorities, since there is the implication that the Zen master is enlightened, a fully attained being.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Baker case is that the people at the SFZC did not change their fundamental understanding of the process they had gone through for, in some cases, twenty or more years. This is not surprising, being, as it is, a natural result of the customs and environment created by the Zen institution.

### **The Zen Institution**

[Note: This section offers background mostly not covered in Downing's book.]

For some thirty years a significant group of scholars have been investigating the development of the Chan sect in Chinese Buddhism. They have shown us clearly that much of what has been presented by the tradition as "history," is really a myth created with two purposes. One was to make the state consider Chan the primary sect of Buddhism. The other was to establish Chan's primacy over the indigenous teachings of Confucianism and Taoism in the eyes of the state and the elite of society. The same myth was later used in Japan for similar purposes, with Shintoism being the competing indigenous teaching.

Despite its iconoclastic image, Zen has in actuality been a remarkably conservative institution throughout its history, almost always tied to and controlled by the state and elite elements of society. There is certainly nothing anti-authoritarian about the notion of unbroken lineage going back to the historical Buddha. Likewise, Dharma transmission was as much about institutional prosperity, prestige, authority, continuity and acceptance and control by imperial authorities as it

was about notions of enlightenment and spiritual perfection. The Zen master is a role that stands as a representative of the entire Zen institution. He occupies an authoritative place in East Asian cultures that have already been imbued with a special level of hierarchy since ancient times. It could fairly be said that what is effectively transmitted by Dharma transmission is institutional authority, rather than religious wisdom. However, I do not mean to imply there is no inner spiritual content to the Zen tradition.

Dharma transmission has been awarded and is still awarded for many reasons besides spiritual attainment. In fact, it was often not based on spiritual attainment at all, most especially so in Japanese Soto Zen, which is the sect of Suzuki, Baker and the San Francisco Zen Center. In this sect, Dharma transmission is commonly a father-son transmission ritual culminating in the son's inheritance of the family temple. Spiritual attainment, insight into timeless truth(s) or any other profound changes in one's inner life play virtually no part in the majority of these Dharma transmissions or in the every day functions of these roshis.

But the Soto sect tries to have it both ways. It allows bureaucratic transmission, but it also uses "historical" biographies of eminent masters presented as desireless beings, the koans, and the many Zen stories and dialogues (mondo) to legitimize and to enhance authority, that make clear that transmission is given because of a deep insight into reality or spiritual attainment. Read any of these texts of Zen, *The Book of Serenity*, a Soto sect koan collection, being one prominent example, and this will be abundantly clear.

"Hollow" transmissions such as those between father and son are incorporated into the unbroken lineage to the Buddha. (If the reader wants to argue that Dharma transmission in the Rinzai sect or in the modern Sanbokyodan sect so popular in the West matches the ideal of Zen rhetoric, please feel free to email me at my address listed in the Notes.)

Even when Dharma transmission does reflect some level of something we may call spiritual attainment, it is not based on the idealized version proffered by the Zen institution: a mystical meeting of minds between teacher and disciple sharing a timeless truth that unvaryingly matches the minds of all teachers going back in the lineage, through the six Chan Patriarchs in China, and the twenty eight generations of the supposed Indian lineage going back to the historical Buddha, and beyond. This is a mythology of Zen, a pure fiction. The Zen institution requires the master because he is supposedly a living example of the ideal of Zen and, as such, represents all of its legitimacy and authority. A large institution like Zen requires hundreds of such living role players. This necessitates the production of virtual quotas of such highly exalted people, while in the realm of "spiritual attainment" it is rare to produce just one such person. Therefore, in the living world of flesh and blood we have people with some very limited level of attainment occupying a role that is defined as Buddha-like, actualizing perfect freedom and unfathomable compassion beyond the ordinary person's understanding and hence above question. However Zen texts may define the role, Zen masters have not been fully enlightened beings beyond question.

In the 1960's and 70's, San Francisco Zen Center students, like most other Zen students in the U.S.A., thoroughly accepted (among a range of glaring historical inaccuracies) the idealistic Zen rhetoric, including the notion that Dharma transmission is only about spiritual attainment, that all roshis are essentially equal, and that Zen institutions in East Asia are apolitical and divorced from the state. It is interesting to note that these beliefs persisted strongly even into the year 2000, roughly the time of Downing's interviews when there had been thirty-five years of sexual and financial scandals in the Zen community in America. This would have led any impartial observer to question the spiritual implications of Dharma transmission. By this time there had also been an abundance of scholarly writing and empirical evidence exposing much of the mythology surrounding Zen.

So why did none of Baker's students, as expressed in their interviews with Downing, show any awareness that institutional self-definition encouraged their idealization of Baker, which allowed, perhaps even fostered, the occurrence of many of the alleged abuses? No one took the opportunity to stand back and view the entire affair from any sort of sociological, anthropological, psychological or religious-historical perspective. Nor did anyone even think to view the situation through the lens of the Buddhist teachings themselves or even the particular teachings of their beloved founder Suzuki. I think this happened because Zen's teaching to avoid words and explanation was taken too literally and has fostered an unfortunate narrowing of perspective. This is also extremely disempowering which can lead to all sorts of problems, as the SFZC case clearly shows. With one or two exceptions, the only views expressed of Baker's errant behavior among the Center's members was in the context of their personal experience. I assume that Downing would have included a broader view if he had heard it from any of the interviewees.

In the West in general, but particularly in America, we place great importance on each person's individuality and uniqueness and hence on our personal experience. We seem to forget that we live with other humans and that society is a human product that we act upon and that acts upon us and in a sense produces us. Our personal experience is socially constructed in dialogue with society and with ourselves. In the case of Zen, students usually come to the teacher with a set of preconceptions, acquired mostly through reading, about the fully attained Zen master as being virtually beyond their comprehension. The historical Zen masters we have all come to know are always presented in terms of supposedly real people, with names, dates, and locations, and reports of purportedly real conversations and interactions with other monks and sometimes lay people as if there is no doubt at all that we are dealing with historical individuals.

This "history" has added weight because it is presented as biographical fact. Practitioners are given the ultimate encouragement of knowing that real people "attained enlightenment" and therefore so can we. But how real is this history? Most of the narratives of the early heroes of Chan that we have today were composed hundreds of years after the ostensive events, complete with verbatim accounts of the master's interaction with a disciple presented as if a court stenographer had been recording the entire interaction.

Interestingly, the later versions of the supposed events often have more detail than the earlier versions, implying that we are dealing with literary creations rather than historical biography. (See Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice," listed in the notes for a fuller discussion.) There are also accounts of people receiving transmission from masters who were dead by the time the supposed transmission took place. In short, the biographical approach to history seems to be used because it has intimate real-life immediacy.

Writings featured as biography in Zen are most often an idealized presentation of how a master should perform his role rather than the life of a real person. This is hagiography, which is necessary for Chan's self-legitimizing claims of mind-to-mind transmission and unbroken lineage. The past generations are presented in a saintly and exalted manner, which adds to the prestige of the tradition as a whole, but most importantly, to the prestige of the last name on the lineage chart, the living teacher. In the end, both teacher and student fall prey to these fantasies. In this regard Mr. Downing has offered an excellent example in Richard Baker and the SFZC.

I am thankful for Michael Downing's work, which is extremely valuable. However, it should be noted, that he let interviewees voice any number of inaccuracies without comment. For example there was the claim that Zen monasteries in China were self-sufficient, which makes it seem that they were not dependent on the state and elite elements of society and were not actively

promoting themselves to get this support and patronage. The historical fact is that monasteries actively courted the state and elite elements of society, depended on donations from wealthy patrons and or the state, had tenant farmers work their often vast donated and inherited land holdings, etc. Another error is seen in the statement that Yasutani roshi rescinded the Dharma transmission he gave to Philip Kapleau. In fact, Kapleau never received Dharma transmission in the first place, so there was nothing to rescind. There is a whole lineage built on the idea that Kapleau had transmission. (I don't mean to say that Kapleau is any more or less qualified to teach for receiving transmission or not, and in fact he is one of the few major teachers not involved with sexual or other scandal though one of his disciples did have a major scandal.) Cases like this are important simply because the study of Zen history has shown us the whole lineage tradition is built so heavily on questionable written and word-of-mouth accounts; what is said in the present will surely be repeated long into the future.

### **Trouble At The San Francisco Zen Center**

I believe the trouble at the San Francisco Zen Center, and at many other prominent Zen Centers, across the country to this day, is caused by a lack of understanding as to how the ideas of Dharma transmission, unbroken lineage, and Zen master have been used historically. The meaning of these terms evolved as a means of self-definition for the Zen sect to differentiate itself from other Buddhist sects in a way that particularly matched the Chinese social system based on genealogy and to gain legitimization and authenticity from the imperial powers that always maintained tight control over Buddhism. Under the Zen approach, the Chan masters are clearly more potent than the monastics of other Buddhist sects, who merely explicate the Dharma through texts, often texts that are further distanced from their authoritative origins by the act of translation. This imputation of power and attainment has given one Zen roshi after another the power to abuse their position while remaining beyond reproach. Under the Zen form of legitimization, each Zen roshi is viewed as a saint. In the last few decades as opposed to the past, we have had a clear personal view of the actual people involved, Richard Baker being only one. If the past is any indication these present teachers will be referred to as honored patriarchs in the future.

For a peek into a period only shortly before our own, we can use Brian Victoria's book *Zen At War*. Victoria describes how the most prominent roshis from all sects of Japanese Zen interpreted Zen's teachings to support the imperial and militaristic goals of Japan from the early twentieth century through the end of World War II and beyond. Before Victoria's book was published these people, many who were influential in bringing Zen to the west, were routinely presented as flawless examples of Zen attainment. This has a direct bearing on the Baker story and the way mythology continues to be constructed even in the present.

Baker wrote an introduction to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, an edited collection of Suzuki's talks, in which Baker said (p.17), "During the Second World War he [Suzuki] was the leader of a pacifist group in Japan." This is a very interesting piece of "history" which is no doubt destined to be repeated. In fact, David Chadwick, a student of both Suzuki and Baker, lent some credence to this assertion in his 1999 book about Suzuki, *Crooked Cucumber*. Nevertheless, following extensive investigation, even Chadwick was forced to admit: "Anything Shunryu had done that could be considered remotely antiwar he had done before the Pacific war started" (p. 97).

Brian Victoria was so interested in the possibility of a public pacifist/anti-war Soto monk that he contacted Suzuki's son Hoitsu who told him: "I don't know where all of this antiwar talk comes from, but my father and the rest of the family supported Japan's war effort just like everyone else." (It should also be noted that Victoria is fluent in Japanese while Baker and Chadwick are not.) Furthermore, Chadwick told Victoria that when he (Chadwick) had once asked Baker himself about the basis for the claim, Baker replied that he could not remember! Perhaps

tellingly, Baker made this claim at the height of the Vietnam War, when virtually 100% of Zen followers were opposed to the war and hence having an anti-war/anti -government roshi in his lineage was good currency. This story appears to be an example of modern day creation of hagiography that will be repeated in the future. Furthermore this creation has to be ongoing. It will not do for future generations if there are gaps in the line of saintly figures.

You have to ask whether Suzuki was aware of the claims made by Baker and, if so, why he permitted them to stand without correction. (It should be noted that Suzuki could read English.)

We see in Downing's book that it is precisely the idealized notion of Dharma transmission that pre-empted anything that Zen Center members saw for themselves when viewing Baker, their Dharma-transmitted leader, at least prior to the rupture in 1983. Baker and the senior priests dismissed any questioning of Baker's behavior or activities as a lack of insight into enlightenment on the part of the questioner. Hence, questioning and dissent became a shortcoming of the person expressing such a view. At times, senior disciples needed to reassure newcomers who questioned Baker's behavior that all was in order.

One student said that when the senior priests were questioned about some aspects of Baker's behavior, the answer was, "Richard has Transmission." A senior member relates in Downing's book that Suzuki himself refused to hear criticism of Baker by other members of the Center because, as he said, " To his [Suzuki's] way of thinking, Dick's commitment was at another level, so the rest of us were not in a position to criticize him." Because the newcomers' indoctrination into Zen ideology was incomplete, their unfortunate reliance on common sense prevented them from viewing Baker's eccentricities as qualities of an enlightened Zen master. Baker himself was quick to remind his flock that he was the only American to receive Dharma transmission from Suzuki Roshi. This reminder served an important purpose: the Center's members viewed Suzuki's authority as if it were a divine fiat, so that any dissent or criticism was ended.

San Francisco from the 1960's into the 1980's was considered by many to be the freest city in America, especially when understanding "libre" as freedom from ideological constraints. Zen Center members did not think there was any thought control or propaganda necessary to escape when it came to Zen. Members had not the slightest inkling that their view of Zen was controlled. They believed their way of living and of practicing Zen was the best alternative available in America. People put their hearts into the practice and the Center, sometimes going as far as asserting that the Center represented the cutting edge of Zen in the America. When one member was about to leave (after the Baker scandal), rather than receiving well wishes or a word of advice from his teacher-who happened to be the new abbot after Baker, he was smugly told that he would be back in a year.

It is clear from Downing's interviews that Zen Center members assumed that there was no ideology to be questioned, i.e., the unreliable history of Zen, the hagiographic picture of the lineage, along with its mythology of Dharma transmission, unbroken lineage, and enlightened Zen masters. A number of Downing's interviewees spoke of receiving the true or pure Zen teaching from Suzuki Roshi. It was not surprising, then, that when trouble arose at the Center it was mostly assumed that something must be wrong with the members themselves; that it was because they did not use or handle well Suzuki's pure teaching. One older student expressed it this way, "In our hands, and it was in our hands, it [Suzuki's pure teaching] became a bludgeon of power, a source of competition, jealousy, and paranoia. That's what we made of it." All trouble at the Center was internalized and personalized by its members. Institutional mythology, which created a seamless picture of unbroken lineage along with pure, desireless perfection and attainment housed in the body of the master, was not questioned, and hence, remained intact. Baker manifested his authority by giving his followers two choices: obey his words without

question or be marginalized, which was tantamount to being forced to leave. The latter choice was too painful for many for any number of reasons, including: 1) many believed that the Center was the best place to practice Zen and so leaving meant giving up what made life seem most meaningful, 2) their self-identities as Zen practitioners were connected to the Center, 3) loyalty to Suzuki Roshi, 4) leaving close friendships established through communal living and especially through practicing meditation together, 5) loving the lifestyle and 6) fear of losing one's position in the hierarchy and the possibility for future higher positions culminating in being Dharma transmitted oneself. Therefore, in the need to remain at the Center, members had a powerful incentive to fully buy into Zen's mythology. This was especially true of people wanting to climb Zen Center's ladder to positions of authority, power, and prestige, which was totally dependent on Baker's sanction. There is a saying, "It is difficult to convince a man of something if his paycheck depends on his not understanding it." Obedience, subservience, and discipline were well rewarded at a large institution like the San Francisco Zen Center, as Downing's book amply shows.

Baker and Suzuki themselves were rewarded by this system. Besides the personal power of his position Baker lived with paid travel, an abundance of high-priced worldly goods, a number of well-appointed residences, a steady supply of household help and assistants, sex with his students and access to high profile friends. Suzuki's prestige grew enormously. He was leader of the largest Zen center in the United States and founder of Tassajara, the first Zen monastery in America; he sent a number of American disciples to study in Japan and was surrounded, as was Baker, by hundreds of devoted, unquestioning, often young and energetic followers. But in truth, neither Suzuki nor Baker fit the saintly mold.

### **Suzuki Roshi**

Suzuki Roshi, the founder of the San Francisco Zen Center and its leader until his death in 1971, was an impressive person, sincerely loved by most all the Center's members. Baker's introduction to Suzuki's edited words in the well known book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* gives a description of Suzuki as the ideal of a fully realized Zen master.

What the teacher really offers the student is literally living proof that all this talk and the seemingly impossible goals can be realized in this lifetime. The deeper you go into practice, the deeper you find your teacher's mind is, until you finally realize that your mind and his mind are Buddha's mind.

Baker then quotes Trudy Dixon, the editor of the book, thus endorsing her words:

A roshi is a person who has actualized that perfect freedom which is the potentiality for all human beings. He exists freely in the fullness of his whole being. The flow of his consciousness is not the fixed repetitive patterns of our usual self-centered consciousness, but rather arises spontaneously and naturally from the actual circumstances of the present. The results of this in terms of the quality of his life are extraordinary-buoyancy, vigor, straightforwardness, simplicity, humility, security, joyousness, uncanny perspicacity and unfathomable compassion. His whole being testifies to what it means to live in the reality of the present. Without anything said or done, just the impact of meeting a personality so developed can be enough to change another's whole way of life. But in the end it is not the extraordinariness of the teacher that perplexes, intrigues, and deepens the student, it is the teacher's utter ordinariness.

Suzuki indeed had ordinary and even tragic circumstances in his life, as is shown in Downing's book, who references David Chadwick's book, *Crooked Cucumber*, for the following details. He was married three times. His first wife contracted tuberculosis and returned to her parents shortly after marriage; his second wife was brutally murdered by an erratic, antisocial monk whom Suzuki had retained as a temple assistant, despite contrary advice from neighbors and colleagues. His youngest daughter, Omi, committed suicide after spending nine years in a mental hospital; he

gave Dharma transmission to his son Hoitsu, who did not study with him or even get on with him, but who inherited his temple (this is standard Soto Zen procedure); he gave, as a favor to a friend, Dharma transmission to someone he did not know or have any contact with. He also ran a temple virtually under the control of Japan's repressive fascist era government. This is the sort of detail, which might be useful to both present and future students, but it is absolutely missing from all of the completely standard biographies of Zen masters through the ages.

A theme repeated in Downing's interviews is Suzuki's seemingly quirky idea of reforming Soto Zen in Japan by having his American students go there as living examples of reform. His American students accept this theme unquestioningly. Yet, after Tatsugami Roshi, one of the important training teachers from Eiheji, one of the two main Soto Zen training monasteries in Japan, conducted only one training period at Tassajara, Zen Center's monastery in California, Suzuki "arranged" for him not to return because his American students were so dissatisfied.

In addition, the few American students of his who went to Japan came back disappointed, which upset Suzuki because he thought these students would then think less of Buddhism. There appeared to be a vast cultural divide between the Zen Center students of Suzuki and Japanese Zen monks that showed itself both in America and in Japan. Suzuki surely knew that his fellow Japanese Soto roshi and priests would hardly accept Americans as examples for the reform of Zen, especially in Japan. So it is natural to ask, why did Suzuki's and Baker's students mention this so often? And what was Suzuki's intention here? In addition, if there were something to reform in Japanese Soto Zen, the automatic Dharma transmission for virtually all priests, often between father and son, would be high on the list.

Why did Baker perpetuate such a simplistic view of Suzuki? I don't know for certain but Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind was published in 1970, only one year before Baker himself received Dharma transmission and the title, Zen master. Downing reveals that by 1969 Suzuki had made it known to Baker and others at the Center that Baker was to be his Dharma heir. Baker's use of Dixon's words begins the description of Suzuki Roshi, with the strange phrasing "a roshi is..." This substitutes what is supposed to be a description of their close and beloved teacher Suzuki Roshi, a real person, with an abstraction, "a roshi." Yet Baker certainly knew that, at best, few if any roshi are so fully realized. More tellingly, Baker, inserted the very idealized description of qualities and characteristics supposedly of Suzuki Roshi, generalized to all roshi, knowing it would inevitably, indeed shortly, be applied to himself.

Even though the bureaucratic "transmissions" in the Soto church have nothing to do with spiritual insight, the Soto institution does nothing to dissuade people thinking that there is a mind-to-mind connection between its "roshis" and the historical Buddha. In fact, Suzuki's lineage, now and as long as the line survives, comes through his son Hoitsu and Baker and that unknown person. In particular, Suzuki's San Francisco Zen Center lineage continues through his bureaucratic "transmission" to his son Hoitsu. In time Suzuki, Baker, Hoitsu, and Unknown will blend into that "history" of immaculate patriarchs. This is not ancient history. Before our eyes we have a living person becoming a faceless, a-historical person. It is a sanitized description wherein any one roshi is replaceable by any other roshi, which is really no person at all. There is nothing in the description that allows someone in the future to distinguish Suzuki, Hoitsu or any of their heirs from any of thousands of hallowed ancestors.

This formulaic collection of qualities of a Zen master, is not neutral. The experience of legitimacy, realness and of being believable hides the underlying power relations. This "non-person" i.e., a roshi, is a generic person, who supposedly is a real member of the Buddha's family, the holder of absolute truth, whose function besides producing an heir to keep the lineage alive, is to wield authority: to be listened to, obeyed and bowed down to.



And perhaps most importantly, his authority will be understood with a taken-for-granted quality of being natural. Institutional power, authority, hierarchy and order are, hence, accomplished through self-censorship by the members, a more effective method for controlling dissent and questioning than coercion by the leaders.

It was not mentioned in the interviews that Suzuki himself might be partially responsible for the ensuing trouble. It is possible that Suzuki had a paternal attachment to Baker. Suzuki enabled the ensuing trouble by transmitting only to Baker to the exclusion of other westerners, by failing to understand Baker's character, by failing to mitigate his authority in any way, and by failing to explain clearly the historical and common way that Dharma transmission was and is used in Soto Zen. In not clearly explaining the meaning, to his disciples at the SFZC, of his transmission to Baker, while stressing that it was "real;" Suzuki chose to perpetuate a fiction and to dishonor the trust they had given him. His focus on having the Center grow quickly and on reforming Soto Zen in Japan may also have contributed to the problems.

Understandably, Suzuki may not have been able to read across the Japanese-American cultural divide and therefore not see the character flaws of Baker that were obvious to some of his unenlightened American students. Finally, as Suzuki apologized to Baker for what he was going to do to him, i.e., give him and only him Dharma transmission, Suzuki knew that all was not right or ripe or both with Baker. Yet for reasons known only to him he proceeded to make Baker his only American Dharma heir. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Suzuki, in so many ways an admirable person, had a large hand in the problems that followed his death.

Why should we think that Suzuki chose Baker as his only American Dharma heir based on his level of "spiritual attainment?" After all, the only two previous Dharma transmissions Suzuki gave, to his son Hoitsu and to Unknown, were not based on attainment at all. Remember the senior student who quoted Suzuki as saying, "Dick's commitment is at another level, so the rest of us simply were not in a position to criticize him." Interestingly, Suzuki did not mention "spiritual attainment," but rather commitment. This is not surprising if we remember that in Soto Zen "spiritual attainment" is rarely a criterion for Dharma transmission. We may however, ask, "What commitment was Suzuki referring to?" Was Baker's commitment to Zen practice much greater than a number of other of Suzuki's close, very committed senior disciples? Or was it that Baker, in addition to his commitment to Zen, was more committed to institutional growth than the others, and importantly, was the only disciple who possessed the necessary skills and qualities to achieve the growth; the growth that Suzuki desired?

All of this is in the context of Suzuki, the Zen master, being a man whose quality of life is described as: "buoyancy, vigor, straightforwardness, simplicity, humility, security, joyousness, uncanny perspicacity and unfathomable compassion." This is a person without a defect, showing no self-interest, desire, interior calculation, or a shortcoming. Yet we all know that no human is like this. Suzuki or any other Zen master only looks this way if we avoid looking at their real life. But that is the way that Suzuki or Baker or any roshi is presented. And that very presentation is the freight of the Zen machine. It means, "Don't ask. Trust me." It is an institutional dream that needs to be analyzed using its own description.

### **Zen Mind?**

Richard Baker is a man who through the ritual of Dharma transmission has been installed in the Soto Zen sect's "authentic" unbroken lineage going back to the historical Buddha. In the future, his name will be used as proof of authenticity for someone else that is also claiming this authentic connection to the Buddha. This is one reason why we are looking at his case, to see how the

system works, how it has always worked.

When it came to Baker's transmission from Suzuki, virtually all the students interviewed by Downing assumed that it was a "real" transmission. It was considered "real" because it came from the saintly Suzuki and Suzuki made a point of saying it was "real." By saying this, he was emphasizing his guarantee that the essence of the Zen lineage resides in Baker. One student stated it as, "The one thing that seemed unquestionable was Richard's Transmission." It did not matter that Baker did not appear to offer his students the "living proof that... the seemingly impossible goal [of Zen] can be realized in this lifetime" as Baker himself described the function of the teacher. In fact, a number of older students who had known Baker for years left the Zen Center when he was installed as both abbot and roshi of SFZC.

If someone attempted to question some aspect of Baker's behavior, both Baker and senior disciples reminded them that Baker was the only American Dharma heir of Suzuki. The senior disciples consistently stressed that Baker's transmission was real; it made him into a "pure vessel of the Dharma," a man of wisdom, far beyond the questioner's obviously limited understanding and suspicion. It was almost like a magic theater, where if someone received Dharma transmission, and hence, was a supposed enlightened being, he would become a different person who could do anything he pleased. One justification sometimes heard, glib to my ear, is that enlightenment is not about morality. Not surprisingly, virtually 100% of the time these breaches of morality serve the pleasure and interests of the supposed enlightened one. It seems that Zen's emphasis on wisdom, while giving compassion only lip service, is really about power. It is clear that the senior members of Zen Center surrounding Baker were well-indoctrinated vessels of Zen ideology.

As long as it was understood that Baker was the only Dharma heir of Suzuki, it was exceedingly difficult for any one to question Baker's behavior and style. Hence, a number of questions were never openly raised: Was he acting in an arrogant fashion? Had he misused confidences given to him in dokusan (a private meeting between teacher and student pertaining to the student's practice, an extremely important element in Zen training) for self-serving reasons? (Downing's interviews showed that he did.) Was he hypocritical for reprimanding his students for flirting while he carried on numerous affairs with his female students, including one that ruptured his best friend's marriage? Was his lifestyle less than exemplary? Was he acting primarily with his own self-interest in mind? What was or was not implied in Baker's transmission from Suzuki? Was he perhaps not a fully realized person? These and any number of other questions, complaints, hurts or criticisms harbored by his disciples, were not raised. In America, it is common in Zen and other communities led by a charismatic teacher to view events that could generate questions such as these not as real life-problems, but as "skillful means" employed to convey the essence of "the teaching." I have seen such a view expressed in four other major Zen communities as well as in a Tibetan community.

It is fashionable among practitioners in the West to consider critical thought as "un-Zen." With this view in place, the entire spectrum of permissible thought is now caught and limited within Zen's mythological presentation, which was a completed creation by the eleventh century in China. Analysis or active use of "the discriminating mind" is frowned upon, or worse, it is viewed as a sign of having too large an ego. Any genuine interpretation or questioning of the meaning of Dharma transmission, lineage, the Zen roshi, their place in the institution, their accountability, and so on is made to seem absurd. The idea and ritual of Dharma transmission rather than the meaning or content of that transmission, becomes the prominent and meaningful fact. Zen elevates its leaders to super-human status, then emphasizes that we should be obedient and subservient to a powerful and supremely accomplished authority figure, precisely because he is

powerful and supremely accomplished. Is it any wonder that the inevitable abuses that we have seen for the last thirty years should follow?

### **Zen Center Members**

San Francisco Zen Center practitioners did make a serious commitment to their practice. A theme repeated throughout Downing's book is Suzuki's injunction to "just sit," which means to do seated meditation. It is mentioned often enough that Downing, interestingly calculates the hours that individual senior members had meditated. By the seventies he calculates 10-15,000 hours and that by 1987 the most senior practitioners had each meditated some 20- 25,000 hours on the cushion. With this investment it is understandable that one might not want to question too closely the teacher's behavior. It should be kept in mind that the senior members, by 1982, were often over forty years old and had been practicing at Zen Center for fifteen or more years. Besides Suzuki's chosen heir Baker's questionable behavior, Downing reveals many of the senior people scrambling for positions of authority, power, money and perks.

Some of the most senior members appeared afraid to raise difficult questions with Baker perhaps for fear of losing their own privileged positions. One student expressed it as, "some of the senior priests were in it for a payoff-Transmission," another stated it as, "They were ambitious, and only Richard could give it [transmission] to them, because he was the only one who had it." One of the oldest and perhaps most outspoken members who was eventually forced out by Baker stated, "this was a system that was about staying asleep because it was too risky to wake up." Newcomers naturally looked to senior priests as guides or friends, but in doing so, they may have been mistaken. It was like a "game" of Zen where if any one speaks out or asks the wrong question, the "game" is ruined or finished, at least for that person. Senior members also appeared blind to the voices of others and closed to criticism.

There was a widespread conceit in their thinking that they were the center or "cutting edge" of Zen in America, not cognizant that many other Zen groups were forming city/country Centers and also experimenting with the ideas of setting up monasteries, group practice, communal living and forming a sangha. Downing shows that even in their every day negotiations for used restaurant equipment when they were opening Green's Restaurant, they held a disproportionate sense of their own importance in the wider community. The senior members blindly and unquestioningly bought into Zen's mythology and Baker's transmission being above and beyond question. As is common among members of new religions, they viewed themselves as special. One has to ask if something is not missing in Suzuki's simple prescription to "just sit?" Unfortunately, this issue is not raised or considered by any of the Zen Center members interviewed in the book. It is noted that after 1983 the study of sutras, Zen texts and history was instituted. But, given that no one interviewed in the book expressed any view outside of the standard Zen model, one may ask, was the Zen history taught at the Zen Center just more of Zen legend?

I too was a member of a Zen center where we also felt that our group and style of practice were in some ways unique. The issue here is not how individual students behave foolishly or even in a self-serving way, it is the admonition to "just sit" - even for twenty thousand hours - is no guarantee against foolishness or delusion. The admonition to "just sit," to "just practice," is one more way in which trust in one's discriminating faculties or any other Buddhist practice are cut off. In reality it means, "don't question, don't look!"

It is important to remember now that the interviews Downing conducted in 1998-2000 were long after the events at the SFZC took place. People interviewed had the luxury of hindsight. Despite this, few people interviewed seemed to be aware that by continually repeating the transmission story without reflection and without making the effort to understand what they were part of, they were in fact becoming an integral component in the creation of a new myth-which was then used

by people like Richard Baker. San Francisco Zen Center students and other students throughout history were also one cause of the problem.

The student who enters the "practice" having read a myth will expect to find the myth, and will think they have found the myth. What they really found is another story of flawed human behavior.

### **Baker Sums It Up**

In 1989, some six years after Baker was forced to leave, he threatened to take back Zen Center by going to court. Baker claimed the Center was "denying 2,500 years of how Buddhism was developed and continued..." He made a number of other historically inaccurate claims, and finally dropped the suit saying that he was pressured to institute the threat by a lawyer student of his: "There was a lawyer who kept bugging me." Baker also claimed that he was trying "to protect Suzuki Roshi's legacy and lineage." Downing quotes a prominent older student who expressed it differently, "Dick tried to take over Zen Center again." The suit cost the SFZC \$35,000 to \$40,000 in legal fees at a time when it was under financial pressure.

While leader of the SFZC, Baker's purchase of a new white BMW became a focal point for much of the anger and resentments that Zen Center members felt towards him. At the time of the purchase, Baker claimed he needed so expensive a car because of the amount of driving he did. "It was a fantastic drive," he said, it was safe to drive and that he liked to keep his legs in zazen posture. Baker adds he was "on a roll," was in love with his latest girlfriend and that his peers, est founder Werner Erhard and the well known Tibetan teacher Trungpa, had chauffeurs and large Mercedes, so "I thought I should buy a car." During his interview with Downing, Baker Roshi explains that having a "nice car," girlfriends and going out to dinner were implementations of Suzuki Roshi's commitment to lay practice.

Not what the holy man is but what he signifies in the eyes of those who are not holy gives him his world- historical value. It is because one was wrong about him, because one misinterpreted the states of his soul and drew as sharp a line as is possible between oneself and him, as if he were something utterly incomparable and strangely superhuman-that he gained that extraordinary power with which he could dominate the imagination of whole peoples and ages.  
---Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (1878)

### **Bibliographical Notes**

#### **Introduction**

I welcome any comments from the reader. Please send to [slachs@worldnet.att.net](mailto:slachs@worldnet.att.net).

For a very fine book review of *Shoes Outside the Door*, see Crews, Frederick, "Zen & the Art of Success," *The New York Review of Books*, 28 Mar. 2002: 8-11.

I have been involved with Zen in America for over thirty years during which time there have been many upheavals and problems, some similar to the Baker case described in Michael Downing's, *Shoes Outside The Door*, others more subtle and less obvious in nature. A good part of the goal of Buddhism is to reduce illusion and suffering. One component of Buddhism is to recognize cause and effect. Yet, I have found that within the Zen community there is little self-examination about Zen as an institution and its self-definitions and what the effects of these are in the world of flesh and blood people. In Downing's book we see that much illusion, suffering and pain has been part of Zen in San Francisco, a situation that, unfortunately, has been repeated in most every other part of America over a thirty-five year period. Others have told me that my view, informed by historical scholarship (as opposed to Zen's own fictional history), sociology, political and social

analysis as well as long personal involvement, has been helpful in clarifying some of the illusion and in reducing some of the pain. I hope this is the case with this paper. Peter L. Berger, the well-known American sociologist writes, "Unlike puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom."

This article is not saying that there is no place for a Zen teacher. As in any field, there is a need for experienced and knowledgeable teachers. However, crediting a teacher, by definition of their role or title, with exalted qualities he does not really possess, is begging for trouble. A Zen teacher can certainly assist his students in their practice, can encourage the students to be diligent, guide their meditation practice in both public and private meetings, offer aid in difficult times, talk about Zen texts to enrich the student's sense of the tradition and explicate Buddhist and Zen ideas. Importantly, teachers can inspire followers by setting a living example through interactions with their students and others and, with the conduct of their own life, demonstrate that Zen practice can make one a wiser and more compassionate human being. In addition, as there are other practitioners around the teacher, it is helpful to be part of a community of fellow practitioners.

Baker's case took place within a certain context, and to understand what happened it is helpful to look not only at Baker, but also at Zen institutional self-definitions and the patterns of social life they have engendered in the United States. Until one begins to view religious institutions as institutions that function in a particular context, subject to the same problematic power relationships as secular institutions, problems such as those that arose at the San Francisco Zen Center and Buddhist organizations across the West will be almost inevitable. The current crisis in the Catholic Church proves the need for such an institutional analysis. Public opinion shows that while parishioners are, of course, disturbed by priests' abuse of children and young teens, they are more upset by the institutional cover up and denial of that behavior. The Church hierarchy has displayed a consistent concern for protecting and maintaining the eminence of the abusive priests and the holiness of the institution of the Catholic Church, rather than concern for the children and teenagers trusted to their care.

My view of Zen as an institution, some of its problems, and how it operates is most completely expressed in my paper, "Means of Authorization: Establishing Hierarchy in Zen Buddhism in America", delivered as part of a panel on Chan at the American Academy of Religion Conference in Boston in 1999. It is available on the internet at <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~buddhism/aar-bs/1999/lachs.htm> (here you can also access the other papers from the panel on Ch'an ) or at <http://www.darkzen.com/Articles/meansofauthorization.htm> (one can also find other essays on Zen at this site). This paper can also serve the non-scholar as an overview or introduction to modern Zen scholarship and introduce a critical view of the important Zen ideas of master, Dharma transmission, and unbroken lineage.

Not only the work of Zen writers, but political analysts, social critics, sociologists, and my involvement with the practice have informed my thinking about the state of contemporary Zen in the West. I have found the work of the following social analysts to be especially illuminating: Peter L. Berger, Pierre Bourdieu, Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, David C. Korten, Thomas Lukach, Howard Zinn and Angela Zito.

In particular, Berger, Peter, L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Doubleday, 1967, pp. 3-101 applies the social construction of reality theory to religion. Berger begins, "Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise." Ironically, what follows is in many ways a religious text. I

highly recommend this book, especially the first 101 pages.

I am also thankful to Mark Baldwin, Sandra Eisenstein, Simeon Gallu, Grace Luddy, Kevin Matthews, Bruce Rickenbacher and Marlene Swartz for many hours of discussion, helpful suggestions, and editorial assistance.

### **The Zen Institution**

There is a wealth of contemporary exciting Zen scholarship available in English.

I am greatly indebted to the works of the following scholars, among others, whose critical insights into Zen/Buddhism have strongly influenced my views: Robert Buswell, Alan Cole, Bernard Faure, T. Griffith Foulk, Robert M. Gimello, Peter N. Gregory, John Kieschnick, John R. McRae, A. Charles Muller, Mario Poceski, Robert H. Sharf, Morten Schlutter, Gregory Schopen, Brian Victoria, Albert Welter and Dale Wright. Examining the work of any of the above-mentioned scholars will greatly reward the interested reader who would like to explore contemporary Zen/Buddhist scholarship.

A good place to begin to examine the scholarly view of early Chan history and development is Foulk, T. Griffith, *Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism in, Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China*, Ed by Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, University of Hawaii Press, 1993, pp147-205.

To see how the most prominent Japanese Zen roshi as well as some of the roshi associated with bringing Zen to America, in spite of the rhetoric of the standard model of Zen, functioned in Japan from roughly 1911 through WWII, see Victoria, Brian, *Zen At War*, Weatherhill, 1997. Also see his *Zen War Stories* to be published December 2002. Unfortunately, the Western Zen community has not explored the many important questions implied by *Zen At War*. There was an article and follow up piece by Brian Victoria discussing anti-Semitic remarks made by Yasutani roshi in *Tricycle* magazine (Fall and Winter 1999). An interesting debate between Victoria and members of the Deshimaru group (A.Z.I.) defending Deshimaru's teacher Sawaki roshi's wartime involvement dating from 1905 through WWII is available on the internet at, [http://www.zen-azi.org/html/guerre\\_e.html#replybyb](http://www.zen-azi.org/html/guerre_e.html#replybyb). This group is by far the largest Zen group in France and is active in the U.S.A. as well as in other parts of Europe.

For a many sided view of the Zen koan see, *The Koan*, Ed. by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, Oxford University Press, 2000. A special note is given to the papers of Heine, Wright, Foulk, McRae, Welter, Schlutter, Michel Mohr and Ishii Shudo.

For a most interesting examination of early Chan lineage and truth claims read from a critical textual analysis rather than reading them "for information about Truth and Practice" or about "historical claims to own truth", see Cole, Alan, "It's All in the Framing", a paper given at U.C. Berkeley, March 17th, 2002. Cole, who teaches at Lewis and Clark College, also has two very provocative books soon to be published, one on the Mahayana sutras and the other on early Chan texts and the "birth" of Chinese Buddhas.

That Kapleau never received Dharma transmission was exposed in a public letter from Yamada roshi dated, 1/16/86. Koun Yamada was Yasutani roshi's Dharma heir. He became the leader of the Sanbokyodan school of Zen started by Yasutani. Also see the public letter from Mr. Kapleau to Yamada, dated 2/17/86. I have copies of these letters. If some one would like copies, please email me at: [slachs@worldnet.att.net](mailto:slachs@worldnet.att.net).

For an outstanding article on Sanbokyodan Zen, a Zen sect important in the West see, Sharf, Robert, "Sanbokyodan, Zen and the Way of New Religions", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Fall 1995, Vol. 22, no.3-4. Yamada gave Dharma transmission to Robert Aitkin, though

Aitkin and his Diamond Sangha later separated from the Sanbokyodan organization after Yamada's death. This was because Aitkin, being a foreigner, was forbidden by the new leader Kubota Roshi, from giving Dharma transmission, while Japanese of equal standing in the organization were permitted this privilege (p.451).

### **Trouble At the San Francisco Zen Center**

For an important look at Buddhist biography and hagiography though not especially Chan, the reader may look at Kieschnick, John, *The Eminent Monk*, University of Hawaii Press, 1997. In some of these biographies, people later classified as Chan monks were listed in other categories, such as Master Yantou Huo as an ascetic and Master Xingzhi as a benefactor. In one well-known collection, the famous Grand Master Yunmen is not recorded at all. Institutional and personal motives played an important part in the composing of Buddhist biographical collections; this was especially so in early Chan lineage texts.

For a look at how religious fantasies may cause trouble, especially with leaders, see "Religion and Alienation" in Berger, Peter L., *The Sacred Canopy*, pp. 81-101. From the perspective of power and control, the political and the religious spheres overlap. For a view from the political perspective that has application in the religious arena see Edwards, David, "A Chest of Tools for Intellectual Self-Defense" in *Burning All Illusions*, South End Press, pp.177-224.

### **Suzuki Roshi**

For Suzuki Roshi's edited words see the well-known *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Weatherhill, 1970. Also see, Brown, Edward Espe, *Not Always So: Practicing the True Spirit of Zen*, Harper Collins, 2002, *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness: Zen Talks on the Sandokai*, Ed. Mel Weitsman and Michael Wenger, University of California Press, 1999 and for a biography of Suzuki's life see, Chadwick, David, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki*, Broadway Books, 1999.

For more on the Soto Zen institution in Japan see Foulk, T. Griffith, "The Zen Institute in Modern Japan", pp.157-177, *Zen, Tradition and Transition*, Kenneth Kraft ed., NY, Grove Press, 1988.

For a history of early Soto Zen as well as how the Soto sect has understood Dharma transmission since roughly 1700, see Bodiford, William M., *Soto Zen in Medieval Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, 1993, p. 215. "Zen Dharma transmission between master and disciple could occur whether or not the disciple had realized enlightenment, just so long as the ritual of personal initiation had been performed."

For an analysis of the idealized, one-dimensional style of describing a roshi, the one of Suzuki in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* being just one contemporary example, see "Simpleness" in Alan Cole's previously mentioned paper, "It's All in the Framing", p.6.

Also see his forthcoming book on early Chan texts for a unique dissection of early lineage claims and their supporting texts. For an analysis of the inherent power relations in the one-dimensional description of a roshi and how it is taken for being natural, see "Symbolic Violence and Social Reproduction" and "Uses of Language" in, Jenkins, Richard, *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, 1992, pp.103-110 and pp.152-162 respectively. Also see, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Trans. and Ed. By Kurt Wolff, Free Press Paperback, 1950 for a discussion of authority, prestige, subordination, and sociability.

Suzuki's prescription to "just sit" as a kind of medicine to answer all questions and problems apparently did not apply to his Dharma transmitted son Hoitsu. While in Japan looking to set up a practice place for Zen Center members, Baker wrote, "we should make clear to him [Hoitsu] that he is not expected at all to participate in the practice, least of all as head... He does not sit zazen and only chants when he has a service to do for someone." Downing adds, "Suzuki reminded Richard [Baker] that Hoitsu had a family and two children. Did it not occur to him that Richard

had a family, too, as did many of the priests of Zen Center?" *Shoes Outside The Door*, p.135. It is interesting to keep in mind that Suzuki's lineage is alive today at the San Francisco Zen Center because of transmissions through Hoitsu.

It was also mentioned that Suzuki believed that Dharma transmission must be "real", implying that there is "not real" Dharma transmission. Though these themes are mentioned a number of times by students, it seems curious that in Downing's interviews, no one ever questioned what this meant, no one mentioned what Suzuki meant, why Baker's transmission was supposedly real or if Suzuki or Baker ever explained the difference between "real" and unreal transmissions.

Soto temples in Japan often are a family business, handed down from father to son, as Suzuki himself had done with his son Hoitsu. Importantly, the head of every Soto temple must have Dharma transmission. Hence, roughly 95% of all Soto priests in Japan have Dharma transmission, most receiving it after spending at most three years in a monastery, some with as little as six months. Foulk, T. Griffith, "The Zen Institute in Modern Japan", pp.157-177.

In the latter part of the book, Downing points out that the San Francisco Zen Center has bureaucratized Dharma transmission so that in order to receive Dharma transmission a person must spend ten or twelve years going through the system. This is very similar to the Japanese Soto Zen, with minor variances for social and cultural differences. Ironically, one may ask, is that what Suzuki hoped to reform? If this was the case, it would seem that he failed this task in America.

### **Zen Mind?**

The idea that Zen's emphasis on wisdom while only giving lip service to compassion in reality is then about power is an idea that I have just begun to examine. Having wisdom, in the Zen view, is based on Dharma transmission, which implies that the person is an enlightened being. More commonly it is bestowed or given by a teacher to some one with limited attainment in order to keep his lineage alive. However, this supposed wisdom is beyond words, is not understood by the unenlightened who are then not qualified to judge or evaluate it, whether expressed in the words or in the behavior of the wise one. The supposed enlightened Master gets the last word in judging not only the student's behavior and verbal responses, but also the whole of the past enlightened lineage including the historical Buddha by commenting on and judging any and all of the past Masters in the old cases (koan) and in their recorded sayings.

Michel Foucault in "The Means of Correct Training" in *Discipline and Punish*, Trans. Alan Sherman, Vintage Books, 1995 (reprint edition), 1995, pp.170-195 discusses a number of aspects of the penal system, its disciplinary power and the simple instruments from which it derives its power: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and their combination-the examination. He writes, "The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly." The Zen understanding of wisdom imputes Foucault's "single gaze to see everything constantly" to the Master. It is common talk around Zen Centers to hear that the Master can tell your state of mind just in hearing your footsteps in going to sanzen/dokusan, in simply seeing you in any activity, seeing you with a single glance, or in the most idealized version, "he just knows from a distance!"

### **Zen Center Members**

What passes for "knowledge" in society is built on the foundation of language. Zen Center members accepted and internalized most all of Zen's self definitions, history and social forms. Zen's highly ritualized activities added a visceral instantiation to the cognitive edifice. Members along with Baker literally built their world based on the language and view of Zen accompanied by ritualized behavior that added to the sense of being embedded in and being an active



participant of that sacred world. One member quoted Baker as saying, "I always act from pure motives; I never worry about the world." *Shoes Outside The Door*, p.237. This is the consistent view of the master presented by Zen, the pure, simple, desireless and self-contained roshi, and was accepted unquestioningly by Zen Center members. At the same time, this supposed desireless image of the roshi is meant to invoke desire in us for him. See Alan Cole, "It's All in the Framing."

Under Baker's leadership, it appears that the Center functioned as a dysfunctional family, denying that anything was wrong or problematic. As noted in the paper, senior members consistently reassured newer members that all was well when they raised questions about Baker's activities. Interestingly, one of the oldest members of Zen Center, a psychologist, did an "informal poll" of people who had been at Zen Center for more than eight years. "Something above ninety percent of us had come from alcoholic families or families that were dysfunctional with the same patterns." *Shoes Outside The Door*, p.289.

### **Baker Sums It Up**

For an earlier view of the immediate events surrounding Baker, see Butler, Katy, "Events Are The Teachers", *The CoEvolution Quarterly*, winter 1983, pp.112-123.

Baker claimed that the Center, in evicting him, was "denying 2,500 years of how Buddhism was developed and continued..." However, Baker's sleight of hand replaces Buddhism's 2,500-year tradition with Zen's fictional account of unbroken lineage going back to the Buddha. Zen is a Chinese invention roughly beginning in the seventh or eighth century of this era.

Some Zen followers believe that Zen is only concerned with enlightenment and is not concerned with personal behavior or with ordinary morality. However, for an in depth review of early Chan monastic codes and how early Chan viewed and supposedly treated errant behavior by monks see Foulk, T. Griffith, "The 'Ch'an School' and Its Place In the Buddhist Monastic Tradition," Diss. University of Michigan, 1987. This dissertation also asks whether the Chan sect existed at all as a separate and distinct sect in the Tang dynasty, the supposed "golden age of Chan"). Foulk doubts that the Chan sect existed as a separate sect with its own monastic institutions during the Tang dynasty. "To sum up the situation, we have no sources at all from the T'ang which mentions or describe explicitly "Chan" institutions," p. 267.

Zen ascribes to Pai-chang (died 814) its earliest monastic code that supposedly set Chan apart as a separate sect in the Tang dynasty. However, there is no surviving text of Pai-chang's Rules. One of the earliest texts extant is "Regulations of the Chan Approach" (Ch'an men Kuei-shih, which cannot be dated earlier than 988) that some scholars think was the preface to Pai-chang's Rules. Foulk disagrees with this view. Foulk gives translations of two versions of the text, side by side and analyses their internal structure and contents. pp.347-379. "It is, basically, a description of a number of monastic procedures implicitly attributed to Pai-chang, set in a quasi-historical context, and presented with the authors own explanation and laudatory remarks."

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